

Update No 7: April 2019

Working in partnership with Somerset Environmental Records Centre and Somerset Wildlife Trust to encourage appreciation, conservation and promotion of the geology of Somerset

<http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>



Dear all

Firstly to report on our last Somerset Geology Group (SGG) get-together held at Frome Museum on Mon 8 Oct 2018 – our thanks to Frome Museum for hosting us. About seventeen of us gathered together, including three guests from our equivalent group in Wiltshire. We started off with Simon Carpenter showing us some of the geological material that the Museum holds and Simon and David Hill gave us feedback from a meeting of the Geological Curators' Group that had been held in Bath a few weeks before.

The session flagged up the importance of making the link between site conservation and any related material held in museums – which, as Simon explained, could include field notebooks, as well as specimens. Museum collections can also include material from temporary exposures and from sites no longer providing any *in situ* rock exposure.

We then moved on to an update on progress with our main activity: our project with Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC), to review Somerset's c. 230 Local Geological Sites (LGS). See below for progress since our last *Update* in early September.

In the discussion, there were questions about the public accessibility of the information we are collating for the review. We hope the information below will help to clarify this. We are also inviting Leanne Butt, SERC's Manager, to join our next meeting, to provide an understanding of the overall context of SERC's work.

Our next SGG get-together will be on **Monday 30 September 2019, 10 am to 2 pm**, at Fyne Court in the Quantocks. *NB Please note this is one week earlier than the provisional date discussed at our meeting last October.*

We will also be able to give an update on progress with the LGS project following the 2019 summer season. *Full details to come in late August, but please put the date in your diary now.*

Review of Somerset's LGS

We have continued to make good progress over 2018/19 (Year 2 of the project) with LGS in Exmoor National Park (NP), the Quantocks Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and adjacent older geology 'hard-rock' areas, including adding desk work to Year 1 forms.

Wesley Harris, one of the two SERC-based graduate volunteers who assisted with the project in summer 2018, has continued to work voluntarily at SERC on the project (three days per week up to Christmas and two days per week since) to help continue this work programme.

Louis Warnes, our other graduate volunteer finished as planned in September, following a special session to provide an idea of our LGS Panel process. Wendy Lutley has been acting as overall mentor for Exmoor, assisted by Phil Parker's geological expertise; and Garry Dawson for the Quantocks.

Our thanks to both Wes and Louis - their input has been invaluable - and to Hugh, James, Elliot and Connor from the previous year: we would have been unable to develop our project in the way that we have, without their input in Year 1.

LGS Panel – We have now held three meetings of our new LGS Panel, in May and November 2018 and early April 2019 and have processed 69 LGS through it, most from Exmoor and the Quantocks. The majority of these are reconfirmed, with a few 'on hold' pending further investigation. Site visits

are complete for the remainder of Exmoor and the Quantocks (except a small number where land-owner permission has not yet been secured) and final desk work on these is underway.

Site forms from the first Panel meeting have now been sent to their landowners. This post-Panel stage takes administrative time for SERC, requiring, for example, boundary amendments in some instances and final proofing, as well as updating information on SERC's database and other systems.

Permo-Triassic in the Vale of Taunton Deane -

We now have a local volunteer 'team' progressing these LGS (furthering initial work in Year 1). This comprises John Kirby and Saranne Cessford, with Martin Doherty acting as mentor (all from our SGG network and fully signed up as SERC volunteers). We aim to progress these sites gradually through the project.

Mendips - Our plan for 2019 is to focus on LGS within the Mendip District, including sites in the Sedgemoor part of the Mendips AONB. We are currently advertising **for two student volunteers to assist over the summer - deadline Fri 3 May**. *Please see attached advertisement and let any potential students that you are aware of know of the opportunity.*

Doug Robinson is our lead mentor for the Mendips and has already been progressing work on a few sites over the winter. Leanne and Doug are liaising over a draft programme to provide, as far as possible, a systematic approach. A SERC volunteer has started the advance work needed to identify landowners to seek permissions, while Doug has been establishing the appropriate current geological formation names, so that we can achieve a consistent approach on the forms.

Doug has also made contact with, for example, Desmond Donovan and Simon Carpenter from our SGG network, to draw on their expertise as appropriate. Both Bob Corns (now retired from Natural England) and Adel Avery (Somerset Earth Science Education Centre and organiser of the

Mendip Rocks Festival) are also on our LGS project steering group.

South Somerset - We plan, pending progress, South Somerset as our priority for Year 4 (2020/21), with a fifth year for completion of sites through the Panel and the 'working reports' for each district: Exmoor NP; West Somerset & Taunton (to include west Sedgemoor); Mendip (to include east Sedgemoor) ; and South Somerset. It is clear that the overall project will now take five years – rather than the three we originally envisaged.

Devon part of Exmoor - SERC's funding agreement with the ENP Authority requires us to cover the relatively few LGS in the Devon part of the National Park. They were identified originally by Hugh Prudden on behalf of SGG in the early 1990s. We have liaised with the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre and our equivalent group in Devon to agree this approach and we plan to start the advance desk work this year. Several of these LGS may now be superseded by designation as nationally important Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites.

Steering group - We held a LGS steering group meeting in February 2019 to review progress and plan for the future. The scale of the work is much larger than we originally envisaged, hence why a five-year project is now emerging as more realistic. Our current annual rate of processing sites is similar to that for SERC's rolling programme for its much larger number of Somerset's Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). So the project is effectively doubling that aspect of SERC's core administrative work. So SERC is currently making the case to its governing Executive Group for a temporary part-time post to assist with this core LGS-related work.

Reviewing and developing systems - SERC has continued to review its processes and systems for the project, which now parallel those for its LWS Review. We have updated risk assessment procedures. A more rigorous and systematic process has been established to ensure

landowners are identified and contacted in advance. SERC policy requires permission for site survey, including on open access land. Landowners/managers then receive a copy of the complete relevant form(s) following consideration by the Panel.

Our site form - We have agreed a few minor amendments to our standard form for the 2019 season (a copy will be added to our web-page for information when finalised). We are also in the process of updating our Guidance to assist with induction of volunteers for the 2019 summer season. NB Our form is intended for use by those who have been through a full induction on the project and are fully signed-up as SERC volunteers.

The form was developed by collective effort of the LGS Steering Group in the preparatory year. It is essentially three-things-in-one: a comprehensive record of both desk and field evidence-base; a robust assessment of the evidence against key questions; and a summary with key information for landowners/managers. Completing it can seem repetitive, but it is providing what we need!

LGS Panel – The LGS Panel members are then able to consider the full information and in some instances have robust discussion before formal reconfirmation (or otherwise) of each site. In addition to those of us acting as mentors, Keith Moore brings his experience from the Devon process in the 1990s and of geological education; Bob Corns his background from Natural England; Pamela Morris her knowledge of landscape conservation from her role with Exmoor NP; and in 2018 Sarah Povall from Somerset County Council assisted with planning expertise.

Resourcing - the project continued to be supported in 2018/19 by grants secured in Year 1 from the Curry Fund of the Geologists' Association (GA); the Pat Hill-Cottingham Memorial Fund of Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society (SANHS); Exmoor NP Authority; and the Quantocks AONB. That support is much appreciated.

Talks and articles on the project - Since September Garry has given talks on the LGS project to Mendip Rocks Festival, SANHS and the Open University Geology Society South West Branch (OUGS SW) and written a report for SANHS. Martin Doherty attended the annual meeting of Geo-ConservationUK on our behalf and Wendy wrote an article for its newsletter. We are also now invited twice yearly, with the other recording groups that work in partnership with SERC, to attend its Specialist Recording Groups' meetings to exchange information.

Liaison with site owners and managers

Many of Somerset's LGS are on land owned by organisations such as the National Trust, Forestry Commission, water authorities and District Councils, as well as sites owned by private landowners.

There is therefore enormous scope in our LGS review to inform landowners of the conservation interest they hold - as a first step to developing an ongoing relationship to achieve any conservation management needed or to further explore the potential for field studies use and interpretative material for the public.

Hence, the focus of our LGS review is on providing information for landowners and managers in this first instance. More detailed liaison with owners is beyond the scope of the project - and of SERC's remit - but it is clear that the project is already opening doors for SGG to develop relationships in this respect.

For example, Garry has secured a donation from Wessex Water, as a result of practical conservation work carried out by OUGS SW that he organised at Clatworthy Reservoir LGS (see below for a further session) and his advice on interpretive material. We are delighted that OUGS SW has agreed that it will be contributed to support the LGS review.

In January, Wendy had a preliminary meeting with the National Trust to flag up LGS under its ownership and explain the LGS review.

Garry also organised a meeting to explore the potential for small-scale conservation work and associated interpretive material on LGS on Forestry Commission holdings in the Quantocks. Wendy attended and the discussion was a good illustration of the issues that a landowner may need to consider.

This can include Health and Safety issues, such as the need to avoid inadvertently encouraging inappropriate public access to loose rock faces, or beneath over-mature trees, by clearing scrub that currently acts as a deterrent. Or an access route across an adjacent owner's land may be held only for management purposes.

Any conservation work or use for field studies therefore requires the agreement of the land owner/manager - and they may need to consider how it fits in with other uses, and any implications, for example, for their public liability insurance.

Interpretative material for the public also needs to be considered carefully – and may be best positioned at a general information point on an open space, rather than at a specific LGS – or in some instances it may be best available on-line.

Hence why, back in the early 1990s, Hugh Prudden recognised the need to 'sort' Somerset LGS into those that simply need to be conserved for research purposes; those that might be useful for group field studies; and those suitable for interpretive material for the general public.

His *Somerset Good Rock Guide* published in 2004 was a step towards this, following on from the initial work to identify LGS. We plan to add it to our web page - with the caveat that access arrangements do need to be checked as some of the information may now be out of date.

We hope everyone will understand that it will therefore take some time - and further separate project(s) - to develop the equivalent publicly available information this time round to follow on from our current LGS review.

Planning

During the winter, our SGG Coordinating group clarified the process by which SGG may be consulted in relation to any planning applications for development on LGS. We are not statutory consultees that are automatically alerted.

Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) has a planning volunteer and we have now agreed that SWT will flag up, in its response to any relevant planning applications, if a LGS is involved and raise the fact that SERC may hold information and that SGG may wish to comment.

Only one planning application has been drawn to our attention over the last year – in January 2019 regarding an extension to Tout Quarry in the Blue Lias in South Somerset.

We have suggested that conditions be explored to ensure appropriate temporary recording and collection of any significant fossil specimens, if Somerset County Council, as mineral planning authority, is minded to approve. We have also indicated that David Hill of our SGG Coordinating group would be willing to provide further initial advice if this would be helpful.

LGS are a planning designation, referred to in the National Planning Policy Framework (last version published in Feb 2019). SERC is a not-for-profit partnership-led organisation, hosted within SWT, and one of its main sources of income is from funding agreements with the planning authorities in Somerset - in return for providing data and information for their planning purposes.

Developers and their consultants also request a data search from SERC, in line with best-practice procedures, to establish if any LGS or LWS (or protected species) may be affected by a proposed development. They are required to contribute a fee to SERC for this.

Practical conservation work

There are two forthcoming dates if you would like to help with practical earth science conservation work in Somerset:

- **Thurs 9 May 2019** – a practical conservation session at **Vallis Vale**, south east Somerset. Led by Alan Holiday for Dorset Important Geological Sites (DIGS) group - with many thanks from us, as DIGS has been organising practical conservation work here for some years now! Please make contact directly with Alan at alanholiday@btinternet.com in advance to confirm arrangements.
- **Sat 28 Sept 2019** - a second practical conservation session at **Clatworthy Reservoir**, west Somerset. Led by Garry Dawson for OUGS SW. See <https://ougs.org/events/popup/2122/local-geology-site-lgs-conservation/> for full details, including the need to book in advance.

Making earth science accessible for everyone

GeoWeek takes place Sat 4 to Sun 12 May in 2019 (co-ordinated nationally by the Earth Science Education Forum). See www.geoweek.org.uk for how to submit events, the overall programme and details of individual events.

Mendip Rocks Festival will take place Sat 10 Aug to Sun 20 Oct 2019. The last week coincides with Earth Science Week (see below). See www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events/ or www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk for the final programme nearer the time.

Earth Science Week is co-ordinated nationally by the Geological Society and takes place Sat 12 to Sun 20 Oct in 2019 with the theme *Geoscience is for everyone*. See <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/earthscienceweek> for how to submit events, the overall programme and details of individual events.

Exploring Geoscience Across the Globe was published by the International Geoscience Education Organisation (IGEO) in February and has been written by Chris King, who is part of our SGG network. It is an online textbook, downloadable (41 MB) for free, from

<http://www.igeoscienced.org/teaching-resources/geoscience-text-books/> .

It covers the International Geoscience Syllabus and is intended to include all that an able sixteen year old student should know and understand about Earth science on leaving school. Geology teachers are invited to customise this 'international version' to create a textbook for their own region using local examples.

Building stone conservation

Garry Dawson and Peter Wright's work to document the geology of building stones in Taunton Deane is now published. See SANHS Proceedings, Vol 161 (2018), pp147-161. Their voluntary project, under the auspices of Somerset Heritage Centre, is now continuing in south and west Somerset.

Advance dates for 2019

- Sat 4 May afternoon: Churches of Wells (see GeoWeek link above for full details)
- Tues 7 May: Halecombe Quarry experience (ditto)
- Wed 8 May: Sand Point coastal geology (ditto - just over the border in North Somerset)
- Thurs 9 May: practical conservation session at Vallis Vale, organised by the DIGS group (see above for further info)
- Sun 30 June: Doniford Bay, Watchet, organised by the OUGS SW (see <https://ougs.org/events/>)
- Sat 10 Aug: Westbury Quarry *It's a Blast* launch event for Mendip Rocks Festival 2019 with a range of different activities planned for the day. NB There are several other Festival walks and tours on other dates still being finalised (see links above).
- Wed 21 Aug: Fossil Fun Day as part of Mendip Rocks Festival

- Sat 7 Sept 2019: Cloford Quarry SSSI in the Mendips organised by SANHS (see <http://www.sanhs.org/index.htm> in due course or contact SANHS's office to book)
- Fri 20 Sept 2019 afternoon: *Behind-the-scenes* geology store tour, Bristol Museum, organised by the GA (see <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/calendar/> booking essential as numbers limited)
- Sat 28 Sept: practical conservation session at Clatworthy Reservoir, west Somerset. Organised by OUGS SW (see <https://ougs.org/events/>)
- Mon 30 Sept: SGG meeting at Fyne Court in the Quantocks (see page 1).
- Sun 20 Oct: *Explore Ebbor Gorge* – part of the Mendip Rocks Festival (see above)

NB The above list is not intended to be comprehensive, details may change and you need to check for full details with the relevant organisation and in many cases book in advance.

For further possibilities see the events calendar organised by Graeme Church on <http://westcountrygeology.com/>. Somerset events can be included. See also <http://geologywestcountry.blogspot.co.uk/>, Graeme's blogspot, to advertise them.

There are also several other organisations that run geological field trips or talks covering Somerset and adjacent counties, for example, local GA groups (such as WEGA for the West of England and Dorset GA), U3A geology groups, Bath Geological Society, Ussher Society, etc.

With huge appreciation for everyone's activity to help conserve and encourage an understanding of Somerset's geology

Wendy Lutley, Coordinator

Next Update - please let me have any information on geological conservation and related activity in Somerset by **Friday 23 August** and I will endeavour to include it in the next *Update*, for early September 2019.

Somerset Geology Group (SGG) is a member of **GeoConservationUK**, the association of groups whose mission is to *encourage the appreciation, conservation and promotion of local/regional geological sites for education & public benefit*. See

http://wiki.geoconservationuk.org.uk/index.php5?title=Main_Page

SGG also aims to encourage delivery in Somerset of the **UK Geodiversity Action Plan** www.ukgap.org.uk and **England Geodiversity Charter** www.englishgeodiversityforum.org.

Earth Heritage is a magazine covering Geoconservation and related topics nationally. It is published by a consortium of UK organisations including Natural England and the GA. It is free by download from

<http://www.earthheritage.org.uk/>.

Our data protection policy – our SGG Co-ordinating group will endeavour to make sure that SGG *Updates* are always sent as a blind email and that we only send 'non-blind' emails to you, where you have indicated that you are happy for us to do so and where a small number of people need to liaise on a particular topic. Our full list of SGG contacts will be held only by myself, with Garry Dawson holding a back-up list, as my co-coordinator. Let me know if you would no longer like to receive SGG *Updates*. **Please make sure you delete any personal contact addresses if you are forwarding any information to others.**

Refer any new contacts to our web page:

<http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>

and the email address there:

Somersetgeology@gmail.com

A Facebook page, created and administered by Geoff Rowland as a closed account, is also still available. If you would like to access it, contact Garry Dawson via Somersetgeology@gmail.com in the first instance, as Garry is acting as moderator for it on behalf of the SGG Coordinating group.